

The Michigan apple industry is expecting a large and high-quality crop for the 2018-19 season which had just got underway, although there are concerns over the potential knock-on effects on the domestic market from the country's trade issues.



The state is forecasting a 28-million-bushel crop, putting in above the 25.2 million average but below the record of 31 million achieved a couple of years ago.

Michigan Apple Committee executive director Diane Smith said the crop would definitely be above the average 25.6 million bushels but would not reach the record 31 million achieved a couple of years ago.

Growers started picking early varieties around mid-August and are expecting a "good, healthy crop" going into the fall, said Diane Smith, executive director of the Michigan Apple Committee.

"We're looking at great quality fruit, nice finish, we haven't had any weather issues or anything that could change the crop in any way, size-wise or quality-wise," she told Fresh Fruit Portal.

While the summer heatwave did not affect Michigan as much as other states, Smith said the weather had been dried over recent months which meant growers have had to use more irrigation than normal.

"But we're now getting into the time of year where the nights are getting, colder, the color is starting to come on, and everything's working out pretty great at this point," she said.

## **Market concerns**

On market conditions, Smith noted that it seems all U.S. growing regions are going to have above-average crops this year, and so the industry will be 'hitting the domestic market pretty hard' over the coming months.

U.S. apple growers are now subject to much steeper tariffs going into China and Mexico, with India saying it might follow suit from September.

Unlike other major apple-growing states like Washington, Smith said Michigan does not export to Mexico, which in June implemented a 20% duty on U.S. apples. However, she says that Michigan could still be adversely affected.

"We're definitely concerned about that long-term, not necessarily from a Michigan standpoint - we don't export to Mexico or Canada, we do a little bit to India, but Washington does and they have quite a large crop and if they don't have a place for those apples they could potentially go into the domestic market, which could cause some instability," she said.

Central America is Michigan's largest export market region, and exports are growing steadily.

With production set to increase over the coming years amid a greater focus on high-density plantings, Smith said the state was also looking to Southeast Asia, South America, the Middle East, as well as expansion in India.

## **Consumer tastings**

Smith also highlighted that in consumer focus studies conducted by the Michigan Apple Committee through a research consultant over the last decade, in 15 out of 18 studies people ranked Michigan Honeycrisp number one in taste and appearance.

Michigan Fuji and Jonagold were consistently ranked among the top four, according to the study.

Apples included were from Michigan, Washington, New York, and New Zealand.

One focus group was conducted entirely in Spanish, with a group of consumers who are Hispanic in Houston, Texas. In that test, Michigan Honeycrisp and Fuji tied for the number one ranking, and Michigan Jonagold was ranked third.

Consumers said they select apples based on appearance, size, and convenience, the study showed.